

Township Council Moving To Revive Downtown Revitalization

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — In a new effort to revive the moribund Scotch Plains Management Corp. (SPMC), the entity formed seven years ago to oversee business district revitalization, the township council is considering making changes to the makeup of the SPMC's board of directors.

Township Manager Al Mirabella

said at the council's conference meeting last Wednesday that he is seeking "more of a focused group" of perhaps seven members versus the dozen who sat on the board when it last met in late 2013. Township Attorney Robert Renaud, calling the present setup of the board "unwieldy," proposed an amendment to the 2008 ordinance that created the Special Improvement District and SPMC, that would re-

duce the number of members to seven and include one resident, the township manager and a council representative as well as four commercial business and property owners. He called it a "good time to reconstitute and reform" the SPMC.

Since its inception, the management corporation has met with resistance from many property owners skeptical of its prospects and opposed to paying what was an annual \$400 assessment fee that funded SPMC's activities. In 2013 the council voted to suspend the assessment, meaning the SPMC had to fund any activities using unspent funds from the prior year. Mayor Kevin Glover estimated last week that the group still had about \$25,000 remaining in its account. He maintained his opposition to imposing fees on property owners, but left open the possibility that the funding mechanism could change at some point in the future.

Bids to provide professional planning services for the downtown business district will soon be reviewed, Mr. Mirabella said last week, and he told the council he will ask the three or four most-promising bidders to speak with the governing body about their specific ideas before a contract is awarded.

In other business at its 75-minute meeting, the council asked Mr. Renaud to examine the township's sidewalk-related ordinances to determine who is responsible for sidewalk maintenance in various parts of town. While property owners are supposed to be responsible for the maintenance of sidewalks on their property, Councilman Llewellyn Jones asked his colleagues last week to consider a program that would identify sidewalks that are in seri-

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TRANSITION...Seventh-grade students at Congregation Beth Israel in Scotch Plains held a "Moving On" ceremony with family and friends on May 20. The ceremony marked the conclusion of their studies in the synagogue's religious school and the continuation of their Jewish education in its Hebrew High School, the Machon Institute. The students in Kitah Zayin (seventh grade) led the mincha (afternoon) service and put on a presentation, reminiscing about their religious school studies and discussing their hopes for the future. They are pictured with Rabbi George Nudell, top left; Gail Beckman Buchbinder, education director, top middle, and Cantor Matthew Axelrod, top right.

Mayor, Resident Discuss State of Downtown Westfield

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — During its regular conference session Tuesday evening, the town council discussed the state of the downtown area and the prospect of luring new businesses to it.

The question was raised by resident Tim Harrington during the public comments portion of the council's conference session. Mr. Harrington said he was concerned about the future of the downtown and equated it to the City of Plainfield.

"I'm beginning to wonder whether Westfield today is what Plainfield was in the early sixties in the central business district. It's something that needs to be considered," Mr. Harrington said.

Mr. Harrington stated that with the advent of online shopping and online banking, "we've lost six banks in town in the last six years," and the "huge consolidation" of medical practices is causing a "major impact on towns."

Mr. Harrington continued, "When

you start looking around you can spot some vacant spaces, but I know some more that are coming that haven't been announced yet. I don't have the answer, but I've identified a problem that really needs to get addressed...In summary, I think that may be the most fundamental crucial issue...it is something that we have to consider."

When questioned by Mayor Andrew Skibitsky about his recommendations for a solution, Mr. Harrington replied that the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) should, "come up with some facts for the council - what is going on." He also suggested that the DWC hire someone to conduct "a serious survey" to determine solutions.

The DWC is the management entity of the Special Improvement District (SID), an area downtown which covers most of the businesses in Westfield.

In addition to promoting events such as Girls Night Out, the Downtown 5K Run and Pizza Extravaganza, the Sweet Sounds Down-

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TALENTED ENTERTAINER...Among the attractions at Sunday's second annual Garwood Rocks! festival was this juggler on stilts.



THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PLACE...The 2015-2016 Executive Board was installed on Monday night by Suzanne Tucker, left, at the JCC of Central New Jersey's annual meeting. The board includes, from left, Ken Rotter, president; Erica Needle, past president; Peter Weissbrod, vice-president; Brian Shlissel, treasurer; Bob Simon, co-secretary; Stefani Klaskow, assistant treasurer; Carrie Drake, assistant secretary; Elizabeth Isser, parliamentarian; Mindy Goldberger, at-large, and Scott Lazar, at-large.

Scotch Plains Zoning Bd. to Resume North Ave. Development Hearing

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The zoning board of adjustment will resume a hearing next month on an application seeking a use variance to permit the development of a two-and-a-half-story, 20-unit apartment building on North Avenue.

WRV Partnership LP needs the variance because the property, which is situated at 2344 North Avenue next to Charlie Brown's restaurant, is lo-

cated in an R-3 zone where only single-family homes can be built. If the use variance is granted, WRV will return to the board for approval of its final site plan. WRV also will seek a separate use variance to construct two, three-bedroom town homes at 2328 North Avenue.

Last Thursday's hearing, which lasted for more than two-and-a-half hours, was suspended due to the late hour, but not before a number of residents who live across North Avenue from the proposed development expressed concerns about increased traffic in the area as well as added flooding potential.

Sean Delany, an engineer who designed schematics of what the developed property might look like, testified that 12 one-bedroom units and eight two-bedroom units will be included in the single building, which will sit 30 feet back from the street. Forty parking spaces will be located along one side of the building and in its rear. The driveway into and out of the development will be situated along its eastern side. Mr. Delany also described some of the ways that rainwater will be drained, both along the rear of the property and along North Avenue, with both leading to a township drainage easement that runs along the western side of the lot.

When he touched upon a traffic

study that showed the proposed 20-unit building would result in only a few more vehicles on North Avenue than would four or five single-family homes on the same site, several residents in the audience laughed derisively at what they believed to be a serious underestimation. Later in the hearing, many of those same residents pointed to difficulties already experienced in turning onto North Avenue from streets such as Bryant Avenue/Promenade and Whittier Avenue.

Architect Gregory Ralph showed the board conceptual plans of what the building would look like while professional planner Peter Steck testified about his conclusion that the apartment building was preferable to four or five single-family homes on the same property for several reasons. Its relative isolation, given that it is bounded by North Avenue and the Raritan Valley train tracks, means the site is not amenable to couples considering raising a family there. Traffic and safety concerns are heightened when there are single-family homes with children, Mr. Steck said.

He added that one- and two-bedroom units do not typically generate school-age children like single-family homes do. "It's not a family-oriented site," he maintained, calling it

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Bruns Named Asst. Admin., Sen. Housing Opens June 25

By BRIAN TRUSDELL

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

GARWOOD — Borough Treasurer Sandy Bruns has been recommended as the in-house staff member to become the borough's assistant administrator, a newly created position that will serve as a backup to Borough Clerk Christina Ariemma.

Administrative Review Committee Chairwoman Ann Tarantino put forth Ms. Bruns' name at Tuesday's borough council meeting, saying a resolution would be introduced at the council's next meeting on Tuesday, June 23, to formalize the appointment.

"She is the CFO, treasurer and, next to the administrator, has the most knowledge of the borough functions and the government procedures, making her the obvious choice," Mrs. Tarantino said.

The resolution also will set the compensation for the position at \$4,500 annually, Mrs. Tarantino said. This amount will be in addition to her salary as borough treasurer.

The announcement came in a relatively short hour-long meeting in which Ms. Ariemma also spoke about a public works shared service agreement with Fanwood. Reading from a prepared statement, Ms. Ariemma said the details were not ready for public discussion, but that there have been negotiations with Fanwood for "certain management functions and other matters in the Department of Public Works."

Council members held a closed executive session at the last council meeting on May 26 to discuss a shared services agreement with Fanwood but no details were disclosed.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mayor

Charles Lombardo, council members nor Ms. Ariemma would neither confirm nor deny reports on local blogs and Internet forums that DPW Superintendent Fred Corbitt was being dismissed and replaced by Fanwood's DPW management.

"Unfortunately, at this time, they are not able to comment on that," Ms. Ariemma said.

She did say the matter would be up for discussion at the June 23 council meeting, but also said the discussion could be in open or closed session.

"The proposal, if accepted, will not result in any reduction of services provided by the Department of Public Works," Ms. Ariemma said in her prepared statement.

In other action, the council unanimously approved the \$59,000 purchase of a police dispatch console and related equipment and the issuance of a bond to cover the cost. The issue had been discussed previously on several occasions.

The council also gave Ms. Ariemma approval to sign the lease agreement with the Burger King restaurant on North Avenue for the leasing of 36 parking spaces that would be made available to commuters.

A resolution setting the cost to commuters has yet to be introduced. Additionally, the council debated applying for a Union County matching grant for recreation improvements and enhancements. Council President Bill Nierstedt asked if removing the wood chips surrounding the playground equipment at the Garwood Sports and Recreation Complex and replacing them with a rubberized substitute would qualify.

Ms. Ariemma said the applica-

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GARWOOD ROCKS!...Chris Harrison's Crash Chorus performs for the crowds during Sunday's second annual Garwood Rocks! festival.

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